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ABSTRACT

It is assumed that the delineation of values is critical to proper needs assessments. "Need" is defined as a requisite or desideratum generated as a discrepancy between a target state (T) and an actual state (A), if and only if the presence of the conditions defined by T can be shown significantly to harm, indispose, or constrain a subject (S). There are at least five points at which value judgments impinge upon needs determination. They are: (1) the identification of the domain of T; (2) the designation of the particular T to be utilized in determining the discrepancy between T and A; (3) the designation of the difference between T and A that will be regarded as significant; (4) the determination of what shall constitute a "benefit" under the first of two tests for need candidates; and (5) the determination of what shall constitue an "unsatisfactory" state under the second of two tests for need cadidates. The process of needs assessment includes: (1) interfacing with stakeholding audiences; (2) carrying out empirical inquiries; (3) identification of need candidates; and (4) testing the need candidates. Finally the interplay of facts and values in projecting responses to needs is discussed. (RL)

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THE PLACE OF VALUES IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Introduction

The concept of "needs" is currently driving much of the developmental and evaluative effort in education. Needs assessments are mandated by virtually every Federally and state funded program, as the basis for planning, for developing interventions presumably responsive to the discovered needs, and for assessing the ultimate impact or utility of those interventions. The difficulty, as we see it, with the current conception is that it is apparently based on the implicit assumption that needs are objectively "real" and open to discovery by appropriate scientific (read: value-free) methodologies. They are presumed, therefore, to have some legitimate, "natural" claim on energy and resources independent of judgments that individual people may bring to bear about their relevance or appropriateness. They can, in effect, be not more denied than the self-evident need for air, food, or water.

This paper proceeds on the contrary assumption that the delineation of values is critical to proper needs assessments. It will show that there are at least five points at which value judgments impinge upon needs determination. It will raise the question of how values can be identified and taken account of in needs assessments. Finally, it will discuss the interplay of facts and values in projecting responses to those needs that are determined.

Background

In education, as Bode (1938) has shown, the needs concept can be traced to Rousseau. Bode was particularly concerned with the idea of needs because, during the 1930s, that concept was taken as the cornerstone of the progressive education movement. Much of the content of

the curriculum and virtually all of the teaching methods were predicated upon a needs (often a felt needs) analysis of learners. Usage had begun to approach contemporary interpretations, that is, a need was seen as something necessary or desirable that was required or wanted. Defining need in such terms suggests that needs have a legitimate claim for attention.

But even in 1938 Bode was well aware of the problems posed by the needs concept. He pointed out that there was a serious difficulty in distinguishing between authentic needs, felt needs, and mere desires. Further, he suggested, needs are probably infinite in number and cannot all be identified. Needs are often in conflict, so that responding to one undermines another, as in the case of the need for food and the (partially) competing needs for physical fitness. A need might not be apprehended, moreover, by the individual who has it, as in the case of the need for insulin by a diabetic or the need for companionship by a recent widow.

But the greatest difficulty that Bode saw with the concept of need was the implication that needs had some kind of inherent legitimacy by virtue of an objective, independent, "natural" existence. Indeed, far from being embedded in nature, and thus compelling particular, singular responses, needs were value-determined:

> ...the only way to discover a need is in terms of a "pattern" or scheme of values or an inclusive philosophy of some kind.
>
> Let us suppose, for illustration, that a youngster is found to be maladjusted with respect to parental relationships. What light does this shed on "needs?" This depends altogether on our theory of what these relationships ought to be. According to one view, he may be sadly lacking in the virtue of obedience to parental authority. According to another view, he may be in urgent need of a clearer insight into the limitations

of his authority, so that he may persist in his course without being oppressed by a sense of guilt. Either of these views will provide a basis for the determination of needs, but neither one can be regarded as inherent in the nature of the individual or in the cosmic structure of the universe (p. 66; emphases added).

Unfortunately, planning and evaluation practictioners have, to a major degree, forgotten or chosen to ignore the warnings of Bode that needs cannot be determined except in terms of some value system. Numbers of instruments are available that purport to be objective, universal means for carrying out educational needs assessments; indeed, these instruments are marketed as though they had the same scientific standing and validity as do other commonly used tests and measures. But if Bode is taken seriously, it must be apparent that a scientific approach to needs assessment that ignores the inescapable rooting of needs in values is a delusion at best and a snare at worst. For unless one wishes to assume a singular, consensual value base throughout the country (a precarious assumption indeed!), needs assessments in any particular setting can have no meaning unless they are tied to local values. Moreover, as it becomes plain that we live in a value pluralistic society, with sharp variations in values from one stakeholding group to another, it becomes equally apparent that different and even conflicting needs may be uncovered depending upon which group's values are represented in the needs assessment instrumentation.

Some Definitions

As Roth (1977) points out, conventional definitions of need undergirding educational needs assessments are of the form,

$$N_c = T - A,$$

where

N_c = a need candidate (the reason for the terminology of "candidate" will become evident below),

T = some target state, and

A = some corresponding actual state.

So for example, T might be achievement at the grade level norm for some test, while A might be the actual grade-level achievement for some actual school class. If there is an "appreciable" difference between T and A, one might say that this class demonstates a need for improvement on the test variable(s). Or an individual student scoring appreciably below his grade level norm might also be said to have a need in this area.

But, Scriven and Roth (1977) suggest, this definition is not "tolerable," although they fail to provide reasons for this assertion except to say

> Needs assessments have been for some time the most ludicrous spectacle in evaluation. The usual "models" are farcical and decisions based on them are built on soluble sand. One sign of the extent of the problem is the failure to begin with a tolerable definition of need. (p. 25)

As an alternative, they propose that in order to qualify as a need, a candidate $\underline{N_C}$ must satisfy two conditions:

- with $\underline{N_C}$, a subject $\underline{S}$ derives some otherwise unrealized benefits, and

- without $\underline{N_C}$, the subject $\underline{S}$ is in an unsatisfactory state.

The second condition, Scriven and Roth point out, is necessary to be certain that needs represent necessities not luxuries (a person might benefit from a million dollars but may not necessarily be in an unsatisfactory state without it).

In her follow-up article, Roth (1977) rightly points out that neither the classic definition, $\underline{N_C} = \underline{T} - \underline{A}$, nor the statement of the two conditions cited above, are by themselves sufficient to define needs but that both are necessary. The classic definition provides a means for the identification of a pool of need candidates, but whether these candidates represent genuine needs can be determined if and only if they can be shown to meet the two criteria of Scriven and Roth. Taken together, the two formulations provide a necessary and sufficient means for needs identification; the classic formulation generates needs candidates and the newer Scriven-Roth formulation provides a test to determine whether any proposed $\underline{N_C}$ is an authentic need.

Following these leads, we propose to utilize the following definitions of need in the remainder of this paper:

> A NEED IS A REQUISITE OR DESIDERATUM GENERATED AS A DISCREPANCY BETWEEN A TARGET STATE AND A ACTUAL STATE, IF AND ONLY IF THE PRESENCE OF THE CONDITIONS DEFINED BY THE TARGET STATE CAN BE SHOWN SIGNIFICANTLY TO HARM, INDISPOSE, OR CONSTRAIN AN $\underline{S}$.

The Place of Values

If we accept this definition of need, it is apparent that values enter into the process of needs assessment in at least five places:

1. The identification of the domain of target states. Target state is not a unidimensional concept; there are many possible target states. For example, we may specify certain physical target states, certain psychological target states, certain social target states, certain nutritional target states, an so on. Indeed, at the present time schools are asked to provide activities or services that relate to a number of different target states; the school is asked, for example, to educate, socialize, feed, provide health services and a multitude of other services. Each of these might be thought of as a separate domain of needs. If schools are to serve non-English speaking children, for example, certain needs must be assessed that would not be included if the decision were made not to serve such children. If the schools are to mainstream handicapped youngsters, certain needs must be assessed that might not otherwise be important. If schools are to serve as society's major instrument for desegregation, certain needs must necessarily be assessed. And so on. Now the question of which domains are to be included can be answered only in terms of some value pattern. The first task confronting the needs assessor thus is to determine which domains of target states to include, and to deal with that question, he needs to confront squarely the values entertained by various stakeholding audiences.

2. The designation of the particular target state to be utilized in determining the discrepancy between T and A. Roth (1977) suggests that it is possible to utilize five different target states in any needs

assessment, and obviously, the designation of any particular state will dramatically alter the nature of the emergent need candidates. The five target states specified by Roth do not strike us as existing at the same level of discourse; as a substitute we prefer the formulation of Figure 1, which in fact defines six different states. Three of the states are those suggested by Roth: an ideal, a norm, or a minimum. The other two of Roth's states are redefined by us as forming a second dimension to be crossed with the first: personal perspective or institutional perspective (which might be thought of, alternatively, as the idiographic and nomothetic perspectives). Some definitions will help to make these dimensions clear:

- An ideal represents and ultimate goal, for example, ideally, all high school graduates should be able to read any non-technical material that they might encounter under any circumstances. Ideals are by definition unattainable.

- A norm represents some average or typical performance, for example, a student ought to be able to read as well as other students at his age/grade level, on the average.

- A minimum represents some sine qua non, some level of performance essential to survival, for example, a student ought to read well enough to cope with everyday tasks such as reading newspapers, filling out employment forms, completing income tax forms, and so on (historically, for the Pilgrims, reading the Bible well enough to get into heaven). A minimum is by definition required of all students that are not to receive special treatment, e.g., confined to a home for retarded.

- A personal perspective is that held by S; needs defined from this perspective are more typically labeled "felt" needs or wants. A large proportion of such needs may be expected to fail on the second conditon or criterion, i.e., without them S probably will not be in a deprived state.

- An institutional perspective is that held by an institution or agency that some legitimate right to legislate expectations or set goals for S, e.g., an employer, a school, a parent. (Refer back to the Bode quotation cited earlier for an illustration of a need that might emerge because of a parental expectation.) Special care must be taken with this class of needs to be certain they meet the first condition, i.e., are of significant benefit to S.

FIGURE 1

SIX TYPES OF TARGET STATES

Perspective	Level		
	Ideal	Norm	Minimum
Personal (Idiographic)			
Institutional (Nomothetic)			

It is apparent that the selection of one of these target states in preference to others will have an enormous impact on the nature of the needs which are identified in the needs assessment process. Bode's example of the youngster maladjusted with respect to parental relationships provides a useful illustration of the difference between personal versus institutional need definitions--the former leads one to describe the youngster as having a need to deal with his own guilt while the latter describes him as having a need for further socialization. Probably more important from the perspective of the evaluator who is engaged in educational needs assessment is the choice of levels. If target states are defined in terms of ideals, it is clear that the school will always appear to be deficient, for by definition there will always be discrepancies, and probably serious discrepancies, between actual performance and an ideal state. Most school needs assessments nowadays utilize norms for target states, making it easier for the school that happens to have a more culturally relevant group of students to appear to be successful than one not similarly blessed. Minimua as target states are easiest to achieve, but failure to achieve them is surely of greater import than failing to achieve even a norm and certainly an ideal. Among other things, we may note, the school is politically advantaged or disadvantaged by the choice of target states. Moreover, the school that is urged to get back to basics as a way of becoming more fiscally responsible is penalized if, at the same time, the choice of target states is not appropriately adjusted.

Obviously the selection from among the six types of target states (which may involve a selection of more than one) is a matter mediated by the values of stakeholding audiences. Further, different stakeholding

audiences may make different choices--one cannot assume a consensus for any given school or system. It is thus entirely possible that one audience may utilize an ideal target state and find the school wanting while another audience may utilize a minimum target state and find the school more than satisfactory.

3. The designation of the difference T -A that will be regarded as significant. How big must the difference T - A be to be indicative of an actual need? Clearly some difference is likely to occur simply because of instrumentation unreliability even when no difference exists. If for example it is determined that the target state is age-grade norm equivalence on some appropriate test, will a deviation of, say, .05 grade levels, be regarded as a serious discrepancy? .1 grade levels? .2 grade levels? Clearly some determination must be made. Moreover, in the event that target states are defined as norms or minima, it is entirely possible (indeed, in the case of norm target states, it must occur in half the cases, and in the case of minimum target states, it should occur in all the cases) that the targets will be exceeded, i.e., that the difference T - A is negative. How will such "over-achievement" be regarded? Will that be taken as a signal to reduce resources or to diminish effort? Again some determination is needed, and that determination will depend upon the values of the stakeholding audience queried. Minority parents, for example, may insist on norm achievement while non-minority parents may at times be more tolerant of minimal achievement (perhaps for the wrong, perhaps racially prejudiced reasons).

4. The determination of what shall constitute a "benefit" under the first of the two tests for N_cs. What constitutes a benefit? Is a benefit to know how to read? In whose view? Is it more beneficial to read at,

say the 12th grade level than the 5th grade level? If it is true that "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," is it not necessary to make some assessment of the utility of wisdom?

It should be noted that the designation of benefits is a process inextricably intertwined with the designation of target states. Persons do not propose target states without the belief that the attainment of those targets carries with it some benefit. But that is not to say that the designation of target will make it immediately evident what those benefits are. To say that school children should read at grade-level norms does not make it clear how children who can read at grade level norms are advantaged over those who cannot. Thus the determination of presumed benefits is a needed additional step.

Note too that the designation by some stakeholding audience of a presumed benefit does not provide evidence that the benefit is real. In some cases the existence of benefit can be empirically tested, in others (e.g., one must be able to read the Bible to get to heaven) it cannot. The evaluator is probably duty-bound to make empirical tests when it is possible to do so, but is not bound to abandon a benefit simply because it is not testable. In either case, what is taken to be beneficial is a matter of audience values.

5. The determination of what shall constitute an "unsatisfactory" state under the second of the two tests for N_cs. This element is the inverse of # 4 above. What constitutes an unsatisfactory state? In whose view? The specification of such unsatisfactory states is not so well implied in the designation of target states as are benefits, so that a more intense examination is probably necessary. Again, not all purported unsatisfactory states do in fact result in harm, indisposition,

or constraint for S; such allegations should be tested when possible but cannot be ignored when testing is not possible. Audience values are paramount in this determination.

The Needs Assessment Process

What is the character of a needs assessment process that proceeds from the above definitions and assumptions? Clearly it is very different from the currently used process that invites respondents to rate or prioritize lists of needs that have been accumulated in other contexts.

If values are to enter into the process, the question of whose values quickly emerges. It is our suggestion that the appropriate values to be considered are those of stakeholding audiences, that is, any group of persons such as students, parents, teachers, administrators, sponsors, funders, tax-payers, and the like that have some stake--some share or interest--in the performance of the schools or the products of the schools. By virtue of holding a stake an audience has the right to have its values considered in the determination of those needs to which the school should be responsive. The identification of such stakeholders is a complex process although the means for accomplishing it have been fairly well specified (Guba and Lincoln, in press).

If the appropriate stakeholders have been identified, how can their value inputs be obtained? Clearly it is essential that each audience (to the limits of resources) be contacted directly, that is, the value determination process must be grounded (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in information obtained directly from the audience and without a priori instrumentation that makes presumptions about what those values are or might be. Unless they have been grounded in local inquiry, questionnaires

or survey instruments based on needs assessment done elsewhere are not sufficient to the task.

Just as needs assessment devices generated in one locale cannot be used with confidence in another locale unless one can demonstrate the similarity of the the two sites with respect to value orientation, just so one should not regard the results of a needs assessment in one locale as generalizable to another. Each context is likely to be sufficiently different with respect to the value orientations of audiences, and particularly in the mix of audience values likely to be found, that generalization is a highly risky undertaking. The needs of one context are unlikely to be the needs in another unless "thick description" (Guba and Lincoln, in press) indicates they are sufficiently alike to make that assumption tenable.

Those caveats aside, the process of needs assessment takes the following form:

1. Interfacing with stakeholding audiences. Four interface steps, preferably but not essentially taken in sequential order, are required:

a. Domain identification. Stakeholders must be made aware of the possibility of designating different (possibly multiple) target domains. Following on awareness, the audiences are in a position to indicate which domain or domains they wish to pursue. Identified domains must be prioritized on such criteria as centrality to the instructional function (what the school is best able to do) and resource availability--both material and human. Prioritization may be different for different stakeholders, necessitating some negotiation between stakeholding groups to make a final determination about which domains to pursue. The evaluator should be alert to the possbility that compromise may not

be possible; he may then have to make an independent decision.

b. Identification of particular target states. Again, the evaluator's first task will be to make stakeholders aware that different target states exist, that choices among them are possible, and that different choices entail different consequences. In most cases negotiations will be required to determine which target states should be included. Of course, if time and resources permit, all six target states can be pursued; the spectrum of information that would result would be extremely useful because of the contrasts that it would provide. Once target states had been specified (e.g., institutional norms), more detailed specification would follow (e.g., which tests?).

c. Designation of the size of T - A differences to be accorded significance. This step can be carried out as a last step in (b) above, but we have chosen to indicate it as a separate step so as not to lose its meaning or importance. In some instances the minimal difference needed to be regarded as significant may be a technical matter; for example, if the target state is a norm the difference may be determined as a function of the standard error of measurement of the test involved. Even that decision may require the concurrence of the stakeholding groups, however. In other instances the size of the minimal significant difference may be a matter entirely at the option of the stakeholders; this is likely to be especially true, for example, if the target state is defined from a personal rather than an institutional perspective. Stakeholders should be aware of the implications of any decision they render; for example, insisting on too small a value of T - A may result in recapitulation of effort and further expenditure of resources in the interest of a gain that has no practical significance.

d. Designation of purported benefits and possible unsatisfactory states. The process described in b above to identify particular target states will probably render, in addition, some insights into the benefits and debits that stakeholders seek or fear. Further inquiry may be undertaken as a part of b, for example, when a stakeholding audience proposes some particular target state, an inquiry may immediately be launched about why that state is believed to be useful. It is likely that some additional inquiry will be required, however, for two reasons: (1) because the b process is directed at a different end and hence cannot be expected to yield all the information about benefits/debits that may ultimately be needed, and (2) because the evaluator will wish to return to particular stakeholding audiences after he has interacted with other stakeholders in order to test with the first audience the proposals made by those others.

2. Carrying out empirical inquiries. This phase is directed at determining the A part of the T - A equation. Once target states are specified it is possible for the evaluator to collect data that will lead to making the T - A comparison. Some of these data may already be available while others will require de novo investigation. Different methodologies may be required depending upon the exact nature of the specified Ts; use of a norm, for example, may simply require administration of an appropriate test, while use of an ideal may require more complex investigation. Nor should it be assumed that Ts will always be stated in ways that make quantitative techniques applicable; qualitative approaches grounded in naturalistic paradigms are at least equally likely.

3. Identification of need candidates. Collection of empirical data in (2) makes possible the generation of T - A discrepancies; these discrepancies when compared to the standards of significance identified in (1c) yield the need candidates N_c.

4. Testing the need candidates. Each need candidate must be tested for authenticity as required by the two rules proposed by Scriven and Roth. The standards for determining benefits and debits will have been derived from (1d) and need only to be applied. Need candidates that survive both tests are then labeled as authentic needs and become the basis for all the activities that are usually (and generally) based on needs assessments, e.g., planning or the design of appropriate interventions.

The needs assessment process so briefly and so inadequately described here is greatly different from that currently in common use. It is complex. It requires grounding. It cannot be carried out in a single step. It is contextually specific, so that it is neither generalizable nor can it be adequately carried out with a priori, standardized instrumentation. It requires a rather different set of skills, and negotiation skills are equally important with technical skills. It takes time and a series of iterations. But it will produce a needs assessment which confronts the values issue squarely and deals with it adequately.

The Interplay of Values and Facts

Virtually all decisions made in public policy arenas result from the interplay of both facts and values. To rely entirely on the latter results in purely political decisions, while entire reliance on the former results in purely scientific decisions. Neither alone is desirable in the

practical world, however, for the purely political decisions are likely to be whimsical while purely scientific decisions are likely not be be viable.

Yet the way in which a decision based on a particular mix of facts and values emerges in a given situation depends on two other elements: the extent of available knowledge, that is, the extent to which relevant facts are in one's possession, and the degree of commitment to the values that are at stake. When many relevant and well-documented facts are available it is difficult to make a decision that does not take them into account regardless of one's value beliefs; the Christian Scientist, for example, is hard put to doubt the efficacy of immunization against diesease. On the other hand, intensive commitment to a value system may require the rejection of facts even when those facts are apparently well-documented; the Amish have no difficulty in rejecting evolution because it is in such sharp contrast to their fundamental beliefs.

To summarize what has been said so far, we have pointed out that

$$\underline{D} = \underline{f}(\underline{F}, \underline{V}),$$

where $\underline{D}$ represents a decision, $\underline{F}$ a set of facts more or less extensive and/or well-documented, and $\underline{V}$ a set of values, more or less strenuosly held. This complex function is exemplified in Figure 2, which, for simplicity's sake, is cast into the form of a $\underline{2}$ X $\underline{2}$ table, even though it is apparent that each of the dimensions is in fact a continuum.

Figure 2 suggests that there are four basic types of decisions viewed from the perspective of the fact-value mix:

° High fact-high value. In this case a large number of relevant and well documented facts is available, but value commitments also run high. The case of the Amish rejecting the facts of evolution because of their conflict with the religious belief system is one example. Another more wide-spread and socially more meaningful example is the current controversy over abortion. Many medically, psychologically, and economically relevant facts are known but the issues cannot be settled on that basis alone when such intense values as "the right to life" become involved.

Figure 2

DECISION TYPES AS A FUNCTION
OF AVAILABLE FACTS AND VALUE COMMITMENTS

Value Commitment	Available Facts: Low	Available Facts: High
High		
Low		

° High fact-low value. In this case many relevant and well documented facts are available and there seems to be little value opposition to decisions made in the arena. The field of nutrition is a good example (although even here there are counter-instances, as in the case of the recently renewed controversy over the significance of cholesterol in heart disease). In general people are satisifed to make nutritional decisions largely on the basis of facts, making such value differences as exist subservient.

° Low fact-high value. In this case few or only poorly documented facts are available but value differences are impressive. A good example is the field of nuclear safety. The Three Mile Island debacle was unpredicted and remains largely inexplicable; adequate criteria for the safe operation of nuclear plants are apparently not available. But while the desirability of new or added energy sources is a value shared by most, the use of nuclear energy is bitterly fought by many. The commons bumperstickers, "No Nukie Tonight" and "Jane Fonda is a Fast Breeder" amply attest to the underlying emotions.

° Low fact-low value. In this case, while there may not be such relevant information available, no one cares much either. The issue of space travel probably falls into this category. The average American cares little one way or the other and could quickly rationalize a decision either way (national pride for a "go" decision and prudence for a "stop" decision, for example). On the other hand, the available factual information gives even the most dedicated space proponent pause.

It is likely that educators engage in various types of decision-making that fall into all four cells of Figure 2. For example, the task of textbook selection is a good instance (in most cases) of a high fact-low value situation. But is seems to be the case that most issues about which schools are heavily involved in making decisions fall into the low fact-high value cell. One need only think of such matters as desegregation; multi-cultural education; the management of under-achievers, delinquents, sustance abusers, or the disadvantaged; or even career education to see the point. An even more powerful example is that of the teaching learning process: we do not, at this point in time, understand the dimensions of the teaching-learning process, let

alone do schools have any commonly-agreed upon model for this process. So each classroom teacher proceeds upon his or her own model, little sprinkled with facts, and heavily laden with values, in order to determine what is educationally sound for the teaching of young children. In most cases factual knowledge is minimal while emotions run high.

It is precisely because school policy decisions are so likely to be heavily influenced by values that it is paramount to recognize the role that values play in needs assessment. If one assumes that needs have an objective reality and can be determined once-for-all by some scientific methodology, such as a standardized needs assessment instrument, one counts the results of needs assessment in the wrong camp, that is, as facts rather than as value expressions. The belief that one's judgment rests upon scientific fact is likely to lead to an adamant position, one exactly not calculated to permit the negotiation and understanding that a recognition of the value bases involved would engender and support. It is no wonder that educational planning and the development of appropriate interventions has proved so ineffective in the face of the enormous problems now confronting schools, and that the schools have developed so many apparently carping critics. It is time for a reassessment of needs assessment, and for the acceptance of a methodology which deals with the values issue squarely, takes values overtly into account, sorts them from facts, and understands needs for what they are: value expressions.

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